



United States
of America

Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 111th CONGRESS, SECOND SESSION

Vol. 156

WASHINGTON, FRIDAY, MARCH 5, 2010

No. 31

Senate

The Senate met at 9:30 a.m. and was called to order by the Honorable JEFF MERKLEY, a Senator from the State of Oregon.

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

Eternal Lord God, we thank You for the beauty of our world. We are grateful for the dawn of the morning, for the stars in the night sky, for the gifts of love and friendship, for the sublime splendor of the sacred, and for every radiant hope that inspires us to persevere.

Today, help the Members of this body to live worthily of Your grace, rising above worry, fear, and contention. May they see the best that glimmers through the worst, aware that You continually work for the good of those who love You. If there are any broken relationships with others that need healing, we ask for Your reconciling power. Throughout this day, may our lawmakers submit the work of this Senate to You and seek Your guidance.

We pray in Your merciful Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Honorable JEFF MERKLEY led the Pledge of Allegiance, as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

APPOINTMENT OF ACTING PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will please read a communication to the Senate from the President pro tempore (Mr. BYRD).

The assistant legislative clerk read the following letter:

U.S. SENATE,
PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE,
Washington, DC, March 5, 2010.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby appoint the Honorable JEFF MERKLEY, a Senator from the State of Oregon, to perform the duties of the Chair.

ROBERT C. BYRD,
President pro tempore.

Mr. MERKLEY thereupon assumed the chair as Acting President pro tempore.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority leader is recognized.

SCHEDULE

Mr. REID. Mr. President, following leader remarks, the Senate will resume consideration of the tax extenders bill. There will be no rollcall votes today. The next vote will be Tuesday morning.

LEGISLATIVE PROGRESS

Mr. REID. Mr. President, we had a good, hard week working on this legislation dealing with the tax extenders, expiring provisions—COBRA, unemployment compensation, FMAP. So those watching don't think it is some kind of coded message, these are very important provisions. The tax extenders are measures that come at the end of the year. Many of them should be extended for much longer than a year, but we are in a mode now of paying for things, and as a result, we don't have the money to do it for more than a year.

The expiring provisions are very important issues. They deal with satellite TV, which is important to about 1.5 million people in America. Many in the rural West depend on this.

Unemployment compensation—today is a big day in America. Only 36,000 people lost their jobs today, which is really good. The unemployment rate around America has not changed. The prognosticators thought it would go up. It has not. So we need to extend it. There are about 15 million people in America out of work. These extended unemployment benefits will help millions of those people. We were fortunate enough earlier this week to get a 30-day extension, so that when we finish this legislation—we should finish it hopefully on Tuesday—we can go to conference with the House and quickly work out our differences.

In addition to that, we talked about COBRA. That is a provision that allows people who are unemployed to buy, at a decent rate, health insurance.

There have been some amendments offered to this legislation which will really improve it as we send it to the House. One of the provisions is very important. I met with 12 Governors a few days ago. Every one of them wants us to pass something called FMAP, which is money States get from the Federal Government to help them with their Medicaid programs. Many of the standards they have for Medicaid we set back here, so it is only appropriate that we help them with the money that is so important to those States, especially in these trying times. These Governors handed me a letter signed by 48 Governors asking that we extend FMAP. And we would do that. Unemployment compensation and COBRA are for 1 year. FMAP would be for 6 months. It is fungible money. They can use it for things other than Medicaid. We are working to get that done. I hope we can get it done.

We have had a good debate this week. We hope to be able to end this Tuesday. Later today, I will file cloture on the bill. People have had time to offer all the amendments they want. Some amendments, we haven't been able to vote, and there won't be votes on those.

• This "bullet" symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.



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